

Reapportionment

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Columnist

State's cities didn't fare well in 2010 Census

Jim Beam

Louisiana's population changes over the last decade show many residents are moving from the state's major cities into surrounding areas.

The 2010 Census figures released last week show population declines from 2000 for New Orleans, Shreveport and Monroe.

Lafayette was an exception. Its population grew 9.4 percent over the last decade to a current population of 120,623. Alexandria experienced a 3 percent increase to 47,723.

Baton Rouge and Lake Charles grew some, but it was less than 1 percent.

New Orleans is still the state's largest city with 343,829 residents. It is followed by Baton Rouge, 229,493; Shreveport, 199,311; Lafayette, 120,623; and Lake Charles, 71,993.

Population growth in the leading parishes tells a different story. East Baton Rouge Parish is now the state's largest with 440,171 residents.

Jefferson (432,552) and Orleans (343,829) parishes are in the No. 2 and 3 positions, but both lost population over the last decade. Much of that was due to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The population in New Orleans has dropped 29.1 percent since 2000. Jefferson saw a 5.0 percent decline over the same period.

Others gained

Four parishes following those three showed population gains. They are Caddo (254,969); St. Tammany (233,740); Lafayette (221,578) and Calcasieu (192,768).

Of the top seven parishes, St. Tammany led the way with a population growth of 22.2 percent, followed by Lafayette at 16.3 percent, East Baton Rouge at 6.6 percent and Calcasieu at 5.0 percent.

The two fastest-growing areas in the state are the Ascension and Livingston parishes that surround Baton Rouge. Ascension's population grew to 107,215, an increase of 39.9 percent. Livingston, with a population of 128,026, grew by 39.4 percent.

Other parishes with population growth in the double figures are Tangipahoa, 20.4 percent, and West Baton Rouge, 10.1 percent.

St. Bernard Parish lost 46.6 percent of its population, the highest loss in the state. Hurricane Katrina was the culprit there, too.

The situation in Calcasieu Parish mirrors what has happened around cities like New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Monroe. People are looking for greener pastures outside the cities.

Lake Charles' population grew by only three-tenths of one percent, but Calcasieu saw its population grow in the unincorporated areas by 5.0 percent.

St. Tammany Parish benefits from population losses in Orleans and Jefferson parishes.

Ouachita Parish's population grew by 4.2 percent to 153,720, but Monroe lost population.

Rapides Parish was an exception. Both the parish and Alexandria experienced population growth. The parish saw its population grow to 131,613, a 4.1 percent increase over 2000.

Baton Rouge and surrounding parishes have quickly become the hub of population growth in Louisiana.

"We're considered a major market now," Adam Knapp told The Advocate of Baton Rouge. Knapp is president and chief executive officer of the Baton Rouge-area Chamber.

A nine-parish capital region had a population of 705,973 in 2000, and that has grown to 802,484, the newspaper said. That is a growth rate of almost 14 percent.

Tommy Martinez, president of Ascension Parish, put his parish's growth in perspective when he said, "Right now, we have to build a school a year. We're behind the eight ball on infrastructure, and we know that."

Lake Charles Mayor Randy Roach said he was disappointed by his city's lower-than-expected numbers.

"Over the last year and a half, I think we've had some pretty good growth in terms of new areas within the city," Roach said. "There's been a lot of construction of housing within the area."

Roach said his office will take a closer look at the numbers and compare them with the number of customers using the city's water system.

Alexandria Mayor Jacques Roy called his city's 3 percent growth rate to 47,723 a "decent report card." He told The Town Talk newspaper it shows what is happening in the city.

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu said his city is recovering well despite the slower-than-expected growth.

"Our progress has always been much bigger than a population number," Landrieu told The Times-Picayune. "Today, our recovery is in a full gallop." Jefferson Parish, second to population leader East Baton Rouge, showed a loss of almost 23,000 residents over the last decade.

Challenges considered

Loss of population in Shreveport concerns its mayor, Cedric Glover. "I and others had actually hoped for an actual net increase in the city's population," Glover told The Shreveport Times. "I am conferring with staff and the council chair regarding any possible challenge that the city might mount." Monroe mayor Jamie Mayo isn't happy with his city's reported population of 48,815, down from 53,107 in 2000. "I am sure there is some method of contesting it, and we will exercise that method," Mayo told The News-Star of Monroe. Officials in cities that lost population or stood still need to find out how Lafayette's growth rate bucked the trend. State officials should try to determine why other Southern states are doing so much better than Louisiana's slow 1.4 percent growth rate that cost us a seat in the U.S. Congress.

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